

HOW TO REACH AND SERVE THE YOUNG SERVICEMAN

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by
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A vast portion of the young men of the United States passes through the military service and experiences its influence. During the period 1950 to 1960, over seven million of the nation's youth served in the armed forces. By July 1959, six million of them had returned to civilian life, and in 1960, seven of every ten men twenty-five and twenty-six years of age had served or were then serving in the armed forces.¹

As far as the nation is concerned, young servicemen constitute the hope of both the present and the future. While in the military service, they are the muscle of the national defensive arm. They are needed for the protection of the very freedoms which they inherited from their forefathers, a heritage which did not include freedom from the threat of aggression. The Chaplain has a task to perform in helping young servicemen adjust to and fulfill this responsibility.

Many of these same young men will, upon completion of their military service, return to civilian life to become the adults who control the future of the nation. The Chaplain's mission includes a special ministry to these men, that of seeking to influence them to become responsible and productive citizens of the civilian community to which they will return.

Few civilian clergymen have such an opportunity to influence the raw material of our nation's security and greatness. Every Chaplain has this opportunity. This monograph is

dedicated in part to assisting the Chaplain in the fulfillment of this vital role.

This monograph is further intended to assist the Chaplain in the work for which he was ordained. Young servicemen are also children of God and must be trained as citizens of His Kingdom. They are His workers and witnesses, the practitioners of the Faith. They are also His sheep, and the Chaplain must be a shepherd to them. Military service has given the Chaplain easy access to them, but making the most of this opportunity is not a simple matter.

For the purpose of this study, the term "young serviceman" is to be thought of as encompassing only unmarried males, from eighteen to twenty-four years of age, and of the Protestant persuasion. A consideration of those factors peculiar to members of other age groups and religious groups would not contribute significantly to this study. Married servicemen are in the minority, and the factors unique to this group can be considered more effectively in a separate study. Finally, to include WAC's as a part of this study would only serve to create some degree of chaos.

CHAPTER II

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE YOUNG SERVICEMAN

Persons between the ages of seventeen and twenty-four comprise about sixty percent of the total army, making it essentially a young adult institution.² This fact should enable the Chaplain to realize the problems confronting him.

Religious leaders are having difficulty making effective contact with this age group both in and out of the army. Army chaplains, churches near army installations, and home churches have tried many approaches--with disappointing response from the young soldier.³

Although discouraged by only sporadic success, the Chaplain must not give up trying to reach and serve these people. There are two things the Chaplain can do which will be helpful in this work. The first is to become an avid student of contemporary thinking within and about this age group. The basic physical and emotional aspects do not change very much, but each generation seems to have a unique philosophical approach to such subjects as life, authority, responsibility, and the myriad other realities of the adult world which they are just beginning to face seriously. The Chaplain who wishes to make contact with them must understand their thinking even if he does not necessarily agree with it.

The second approach, to be pursued concurrently with the first, is that of seeking to understand the physical and emotional development of this age group. These factors are relatively universal, and are to be considered as essential information for anyone who works with young adults.

The physical development of the young serviceman is probably best described as "the healthiest time of life."⁴ All of his systems are functioning at peak efficiency, providing there are no unusual limiting physical disabilities. In fact, some of his systems are functioning so well as to be a problem. The craving for food seems limitless, a good point to remember when planning chapel dinners. Another physical hunger, the sex drive, is more problematical.

The sex drive is most intense during this period. Sexual vitality is characteristic of the healthy young adult and many of his problems come from his efforts to find expression for this drive in the face of taboos of society and of his own conscience.⁵

It is easy to see how this drive influences young servicemen as well as the community. Is it any wonder that they are so involved in the idea of marriage and so seemingly oblivious to its ramifications?

The emotional development of young servicemen is of at least equal importance, for this is a very trying period for them and all who live around them. Although they have reached a peak of physical vitality, they have seldom developed emotional equipment of comparable efficiency. Regardless of any external appearances to the contrary, this is a period of emotional turbulence, especially in the army. The support of the family group has been left behind, and the authoritarian atmosphere of the military community demands that a man stand on his own feet. The freedom of adolescence no longer exists, responsible behavior is expected, and irresponsibility is punished rather than overlooked. The steadying effect of

experience is still a thing of the future, but the demands for adult-like performance are very real. The conflict between emotional immaturity and the requirements for responsible performance, life-time decisions, and philosophical reorientations produce a condition of great stress. The result may be a sudden maturing or an equally sudden regression into adolescence. In essence, the young serviceman is vacillating between immaturity and growing up, and each emotional encounter is a period of testing for him. Those who fail the tests will bear the scars for life. "It is for the Chaplain then to aid this young man in the clarification of himself, his limitations, his potentialities, and in the clarification of his expectations of the adult world."⁶

Another factor to be recognized is the sociological role of the young adult in the military community. "This is the environment in which the adolescent who already has little identity loses this self awareness almost entirely by being made anonymous in a mass of individuals who are alike."⁷ To some degree, this experience negates much of the progress which the young serviceman may have already made in his movement toward adulthood. The Chaplain, as representative of both the civilian and the military communities, can often help him to regain his shaky balance even in the midst of a depersonalized society.

More specific psychological needs will be considered later in suggestions for effective chapel programs for this age group. However, it is appropriate to list here several factors

which are at work in the lives of all men. The Chaplain should couple the following with his understanding of the physical and emotional development of the young serviceman.

1. Behavior depends on both the person and his environment.

2. Each individual behaves in ways which make sense to him.

3. An individual's perception of a situation influences his behavior in that situation.

4. An individual's view of himself influences what he does.

5. An individual's behavior is influenced by his needs, which vary from person to person and time to time.⁶

The Chaplain who knows his people well can easily recognize and identify these factors. Having made this quick analysis, he is ready to take up the task of ministering to these bewildering, patience-trying, but infinitely valuable young men.

CHAPTER III

THE CHAPLAIN AND HIS WORK

The Chaplain is a professional clergyman whose mission is to enhance the relationship between man and God and between man and his brothers. In the military community, the Chaplain has two specific roles; he is the representative of the church to the military, and he is the representative of the commander of the unit to which he is assigned.

As the representative of the church, the Chaplain fulfills the same sub-roles that were his in civilian life. He is the preacher, the pastor, the priest, the religious educator, and whatever else is necessary to perform his mission. He is also a counselor, one who seeks to make the road of life less rocky for God's people. In this role, as perhaps in no other, the young servicemen will frequently seek him out.

In dealing with young servicemen, the Chaplain-counselor will often be called upon to give guidance in such matters as the following.

1. Moral problems in which a soldier wants to do the right thing but finds it difficult.
2. Moral conflicts and confusion where different forces contend from within.
3. Marriage problems, whether premarital indecision or adjustment after marriage.
4. Emotional problems, such as doubt, futility, boredom, or sexual difficulties.
5. Job and vocational frustrations, such as the choice of proper work or state of life.

6. Social and interpersonal maladjustments, such as antagonism towards another or various groups.

7. Feelings of guilt and scrupulosity.

8. Feelings of bitterness and/or resentment against alleged injustices.

9. Physical or mental handicaps and restrictions, such as scars, crippling injuries, low intelligence, or confinement.

10. Adjustment to a disciplined life.⁹

Chaplains are not expected to be psychiatrists, but they would do well to acquaint themselves with these problems, their causes and remedies. Above all else, the Chaplain must know enough about psychology and the techniques of counseling to be able to recognize problems too serious for him to handle. He must know when, how, and to whom to make referrals.

In addition to a technical awareness of the dynamics and treatment needed in the counseling relationship, the truly effective counselor is one who loves his people, has a desire to help them, and is aware of his own capabilities and his own liabilities. The love of people and the desire to help them are a part of the clergyman's calling. The other factors are the clergyman-counselor's tools, demanding his diligent study and honest introspection.

The Chaplain is also the representative of the commander, and as such is expected "to promote religion and morality in the Army and to minister to the spiritual and moral needs of military personnel, their dependents, and authorized civilians."¹⁰ That is to say, the religious program is a command responsibility and the Chaplain is charged with implementing it. Technically,

command support of the religious program is not an arbitrary matter. Nor does the Chaplain operate without obligation to support the command. As a staff officer, he "acts as advisor and consultant to the commander and his staff in all matters which pertain to religion, morals, and morale as affected by religion of the command."¹¹ This relationship can either add to or detract from the Chapel program, and thus requires a thoughtful and realistic approach. If he is to minister effectively to the young serviceman, the Chaplain must learn to do so within the military framework, recognizing and fulfilling his responsibilities to the commander. The Chaplain can work near-miracles as a member of the commander's team, but he is going to achieve little if he insists on ministerial autonomy.

CHAPTER IV

FACTORS WHICH RESTRICT THE MINISTRY OF THE CHAPLAIN

Several factors inherent to the military establishment can be restrictive to the Chaplain's ministry, especially with young servicemen. None of these factors, however, present insurmountable obstacles.

The officer status of the Chaplain is said to repel some young servicemen. The Chaplain need never apologize for this status, but should be a shining example of an officer at his best. Since most people expect clergymen to be authority figures, they should not resent the Chaplain's being an officer unless he abuses or flaunts his rank.

Denominational affiliations within the military cover a wide spectrum. It is not unusual for the Chaplain to find himself unable to minister to a particular soldier in some particular situation. In such a case, it is usually an easy matter to find a nearby Chaplain who is able to perform the necessary ministry. Let it be noted that ministerial ethics come to bear here, requiring that the unit Chaplain seek someone who can perform the ministry rather than proselytizing the man so that he will accept the ministry of the unit Chaplain.

The military establishment, by the very nature of its mission, is a harsh environment. Some basic Christian doctrines may seem to be out of place in the presence of extensive military preparedness. The Chaplain must realize that his ministry is to bring individuals under the influence of God,

not to "reform" the army. The realities of military necessity must be recognized by the Chaplain, and he should not assume that these preclude Christian righteousness in the pure sense of the word. It is a difficult environment in which to preach, but not an impossible one. The Chaplain must never assume that dedicated military men turn a deaf ear to the Word of God.

The characteristics of young adulthood, already brought out in Chapter II, provide the greatest restriction to the Chaplain's influence. However, it must be emphasized again that these are not insurmountable if the Chaplain is willing to study and work at them. They can, in fact, be turned into useful and effective tools. The Chaplain must learn how to exploit them.

Another problem is that produced by a lack of understanding of the army and the Chaplain by civilian church communities. Few young men enter the service armed with adequate preparation by their homes and their ministers. This results in their feeling a certain suspicion about a clergyman in uniform. A determined and carefully prepared approach by the Chaplain can often overcome this feeling in the man. He can also do much to overcome this problem by his personal contacts with the local churches near his station.

One can conclude that although there are these and other factors which make the Chaplain's ministry uniquely difficult, none of them can withstand the conscientious ministry of a Chaplain who knows and loves his people and who has learned how to work within the framework of the military establishment.

CHAPTER V

FACTORS WHICH ENHANCE THE MINISTRY OF THE CHAPLAIN

Just as there are factors which tend to limit a Chaplain's influence, there are several factors which enhance his efforts.

A. The young servicemen to whom the Chaplain ministers are in a crisis situation, a circumstance known to make them more receptive to Christian influence than when all is going smoothly for them. This crisis is the sudden need to relate to the adult world, and they seem to spend most of their physical and emotional energy at a number of specific "tasks" which they feel the need to accomplish. Dr. Robert R. Powell and a number of army Chaplains worked out a list of these tasks, a careful evaluation of which will open a number of avenues of approach to the young soldier.¹²

1. Effecting emotional emancipation from parents and home, which produces a sudden and shocking necessity for self-reliance.

2. Finding group identity and a sense of at-homeness in a strangely structured society in which their backgrounds, talents, and reputations are of little or no use. Any group identity they establish may soon be broken down by a reassignment, and the same task arises anew.

3. Accepting oneself as a male in a world of adult men, sometimes at the expense of sacrificing personal standards and beliefs.

4. Achieving adult status in one's own eyes and

in the eyes of others. In this effort, they are seemingly confounded by the necessity of being an adult without the traditionally associated freedoms and independence of adulthood.

5. Learning to participate as an adult in the life of the community. Barracks life and life in the community seem to be demanding conflicting standards of conduct. The establishment of a self-role is very difficult in this confusion.

6. Managing the sex drive without the sanctions and supports of the home community. In this area, the Chaplain does the young serviceman a disservice if he automatically assumes that this young man is content to be promiscuous, or that his feelings about sexual matters are casual. Conflicts of conscience are very real in this area.

7. Choosing a life mate in a transient situation. The local community is usually somewhat hostile to the young soldier who is trying to work through this problem.

8. Learning to manage money. Unscrupulous salesmen and the lack of good advice from close associates multiply the problems involved in this task.

9. Deciding about a lifetime vocation. The Chaplain can do much in this area to prepare the men for responsible, productive citizenship. Many excellent resource books on this subject are available in post libraries.

10. Adjusting to military authority. In this area, the Chaplain's effectiveness is largely determined by how well he has adjusted himself to living under and being a part of military authority. The young serviceman sees the authority

structure of the military establishment as being quite different from that against which he struggled at home.

11. Working out a satisfying philosophy of life, to include a set of standards and a value system. In working at this task, the young man faces serious complications.

First, the young soldier comes face to face with persons who live by and defend other standards and values from those of his home community--different attitudes toward race, for example. Second, he is indoctrinated by the army with a set of values new to many--emphasis on appearance, deferring to rank, etc. Third, the back-home supports and sanctions for his former values and standards are weakened. And, fourth, he confronts points of view that challenge his religious standards and sanctions.¹³

Again, it must be understood that these problems are doors through which the alert Chaplain can approach the young soldier.

B. The Chaplain can relate to the young serviceman as can no other officer. Rather than being restricted by military regulations, he is encouraged to associate freely with men of all ranks. Even military custom provides the Chaplain with a special relationship to the young enlisted man.¹⁴

C. The provision for privileged communication gives strength to the role of the Chaplain as confidant. Much of his counseling effectiveness is dependent upon this confidential relationship. This is a sensitive area, however, and "even more than is expected of the rest of the men, he must guard his conversation."¹⁵ Violation of a confidence is unwise; violation of a privileged communication is disastrous.

D. It can be briefly stated that Character Guidance instruction periods are excellent opportunities for group counseling and for establishing an impression in the minds of

the men of the unit. The Chaplain can reach many men in these classes whom he would seldom even see otherwise.

E. A frequently overlooked factor is the Chaplain's enlisted assistant. Without becoming a "snooper" or "informer," the assistant can sometimes alert the Chaplain to problems in the enlisted men's private world before those problems reach serious proportions. The Chaplain must take great care, however. Not all Chaplain assistants are responsible enough to perform this function, and not all of the information he receives this way is worthy of the Chaplain's taking action. If he decides to act, it should be only after careful and thorough investigation, and then only in such a manner as to avoid revealing the source of the information.

F. The relationships between the Chaplain and other agencies, staff officers, and the commander should be recognized as unique and of infinite value to the Chaplain's total program. They must be used with great care, maintained with ingenious tact, and never exploited for personal gain. Without such relationships, the Chaplain and his program will flounder.

G. There are other factors which enhance the ministry of the Chaplain, but the last one to be considered here is that of the reputation of the Chaplaincy. This is a matter of great personal responsibility, and the Chaplain who consciously does his best to improve that reputation, or to protect it from taint, will in turn enhance his own efforts.

CHAPTER VI

SUGGESTIONS FOR AN EFFECTIVE PROGRAM

Having considered his role and the nature of the young serviceman, the Chaplain must decide how he will structure his program to reach and serve his people. We turn again to Dr. Robert R. Powell, who offered ten "principles on the basis of which the Chaplain might choose one method instead of another, one activity in place of another, this approach instead of that."¹⁶

1. Relevancy. We need to begin where people are with their present experiences and involvements.

2. Gospel-centered. In both direct and indirect ways, the program must speak to man's relation to God, to the problem of sin and salvation. This must be balanced with the principle of relevancy.

3. Clear objectives. Do not plan programs just for the sake of programs.

4. Means and ends. The means should be in harmony with the ends to be accomplished.

5. Challenging. We must approach the men at the points of their conscious needs and their more significant interests. We must start them searching, rather than spoon-feeding them with ready-made formulas and pat answers.

6. Tailor-made. No situation is average, so every program must be tailored to fit the current situation and the needs which the men recognize.

7. Variety. One program or one type of program will not meet the needs of the majority, nor will it meet the majority of their needs.

8. Small groups. As one person put it very well, the members of this age group do not swarm. This is a period of individualism, and the young serviceman has had his fill of large, impersonal groups.

9. Short-term activities. Such activities work best for two reasons: first, the status of the participant soldier is extremely unstable, and he may be gone in a few weeks; second, this age group is more willing to respond to a weekend retreat than a life-time membership. Be patient. They will grow out of this, but it must be recognized that they are seekers rather than committers.

10. Avoid discouragement. Anticipate the work of the Holy Spirit. We must do our best as Chaplains, but leave room for the Spirit to do things of which we are not capable.

These ideas will not, and should not, produce a neatly packaged program. The keys to success in working with this age group are such things as inventiveness, experimentation, trial-evaluation-revision, and a willingness to junk the program and start again from scratch. The Chaplain must not forget that these men are struggling with decisions that will influence the rest of their lives. The Chaplain's work is to assist them in this struggle, but there are no methods which will work every time.

CHAPTER VII

AREAS OF PARTICULAR CHALLENGE

Adult Christian Education is a basic tool of the church, but one that grows rusty in the military service. Ingenious approaches to this area of activity are urgently needed. The techniques employed in civilian churches do not usually work effectively in the army, and the program must be tailored differently for the many different circumstances in which the young soldier lives.

Service projects have been in short supply in Chapel programs. However, if the Chaplain's program is successful, he will build up a "head of steam" among the men which must be expended in some worthy project. If the project is constructive and meaningful, there will usually be plenty of support.

Pre-service and pre-separation counseling is becoming more important every day. The Chaplain can and should counsel the soldier prior to his return to civilian life. Pre-service counseling, however, is almost outside the Chaplain's sphere of influence. It must, or should, be done by civilian clergymen. The Chaplain, in the local community and through his denominational connections, could encourage such counseling by his civilian counterparts.

Liaison with civilian clergymen and congregations is more than a matter of courtesy or command policy. Many young servicemen will be visiting local churches, and it is the Chaplain's responsibility to ensure that they are welcomed.

Personal contact with the young serviceman, or any other person, is the most effective tool in the Chaplain's kit. No other approach will substitute effectively for the face-to-face encounter. It is imperative that the Chaplain get up from his chair and go out where the men are. If they do not know him, it is not likely that they will be influenced by his ministry.

Friendship with another person of one's own age and sex is an important source of encounter. But for a young adult, even more important is an encounter with an adult guarantor--some adult who has a solid and respected place in society's powerfield, who notices one personally, lets one in on some of his inwardness and way of thinking about problems, listens to the fragile ideas of the young adult, and sets him tasks which test the upper limits of his present abilities, all because he has a quiet confidence that the young adult is significant.¹⁷

The Chaplain must not only know their thoughts, feelings, and language, but they must have an opportunity to learn his.

Finally, in the area of communication, the Chaplain should remember this rule: never speak until listened to. The young servicemen listen to those who have heard their voices, who seem to have grasped what the young adult is saying to the world. Until the Chaplain has gained this reputation, he will have to stuff his words into deaf ears. As someone once said, "In the realm of words as well as in the realm of physical acts, there is an enormous difference between rape and spiritual union."¹⁸

These, then, are areas for special emphasis. There is much room in them for progress, and perhaps there is also in them a more effective meeting ground for God and the young serviceman.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

There is no commodity more cherished by mankind than understanding. There is no age group more difficult to understand than that of young adulthood. In spite of the degree of difficulty involved, herein lies the mission of the Chaplain as he works with young adults, to understand them and to communicate that understanding to them in behalf of the church community and the military community.

Three concluding thoughts are offered to the Chaplain who takes this mission seriously. First, do not sell the young serviceman short by thinking that he is an inferior product. He is greatness in the making, and the Chaplain is privileged to be an instrument by which God can do some of the shaping. Second, do not be discouraged. Changes are taking place almost daily in the lives of these men. They will soon shed many of their undesirable characteristics and take on a new countenance. Look for the changes, and assist in them whenever the opportunity presents itself. Do not be too eager, or they will ask, "What's he after?" Just be there with a bag full of ideas, and some of them will prove to be effective.

Finally, let the soldier be the center of the program, even if doing so is not necessarily convenient. Every Chaplain will have to decide for himself just how much of his time and energy will be given to the serving of these young men, but one

can hardly justify being stingy with them.

...the chaplain as pastor is the good shepherd in the sense that he loves and follows his military flock wherever they go. He is not depressed by the evil he sees, but he strives harder to bring the fallen, the imprisoned, and the neglected to their senses and to God. His day is not measured in eight-hour work units. He adjusts it to the needs of the soldier.¹⁹

It is unrealistic to think that the Chaplain's only responsibility is to the young serviceman. However, it is quite realistic to think that no Chapel program is truly effective unless it has a definite impact upon the lives and behavior of young servicemen. This monograph does not provide the answer to the question implied in its title, but it should give any conscientious Chaplain enough ideas and material to work out a program of seeking and serving these people over whom God has ordained him a shepherd.

FOOTNOTES

¹Robert R. Powell, "Ministering to the Young Serviceman-- His Major Interests and Needs," Religion In Life, XXXI, No. 4 (Autumn 1962), p. 544.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Robert R. Powell, "Young Adult Education In The Army (Protestant)" (Washington: Wesley Theological Seminary, 1961), p. 27. (Mimeographed.)

⁵Ibid., p. 26.

⁶V Corps Pamphlet 165-1, "Commander-Chaplain Guidelines," p. 44.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Paul C. Buchanan, The Leader Looks at Individual Motivation, Looking Into Leadership Series, Booklet 8 (Washington: Leadership Resources, Inc., 1961), p. 2.

⁹Department of the Army Pamphlet 16-60, "The Chaplain as Counselor," p. 6.

¹⁰Field Manual 16-5, "The Chaplain," p. 1.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Robert R. Powell, "Ministering to the Young Serviceman-- His Major Interests and Needs," p. 545.

¹³Ibid., p. 549.

¹⁴Field Manual 16-5, p. 13.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Robert R. Powell, "Ministering to Young Soldiers and WAC's," The Chaplain, August 1962, pp. 7-11.

¹⁷Ross Snyder, "To Be Lonely: Its Experience and Structure for a Young Adult," Religion In Life, XXXI, No. 3 (Summer 1962), p. 346.

¹⁸Author unknown.

¹⁹Department of the Army Pamphlet 16-60, P. 37.

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